Mrs. Perkins (Pauline Seville) hangs out the washing

At Brookfield Farm: left to right, Mrs. Archer (Gwen Berryman), Philip (Norman Painting), Christine (Pamela Mant), and Farmer Dan (Harry Oakes)

ALL ABOUT THE ARCHERS

It is estimated that more than 8,000,000 regular listeners follow the daily round at Brookfield Farm and the doings of Dan Archer and his family. Many people to whom the well-loved characters are now as real as their own friends and neighbours must find it hard to believe that the parts are played by actors and actresses. Who are they and what are they like in real life? You will find the answers to these questions in this article by KENNETH BIRD

'OKAY, you can say goodbye to Ambridge until next Sunday!' In those words Tony Shryane, producer of *The Archers*, tells his cast that a three days' recording session is at an end. Next week's episodes of the popular farming serial are on disc and the cast can stop being Dan and Doris and Simon and become once again Harry Oakes, Gwen Berryman and Eddie Robinson—if they can!

For it isn't as easy as it sounds. As Harry Oakes approaches his house in a built-up suburb of Birmingham a neighbour is sure to call out: 'Evening, Mr. Archer!' Then there is the ex-Land Army girl who never fails to ask after the crops at Brookfield Farm.

In summertime the dual personality is more tenacious, for Harry Oakes inspects his front garden with a farmer's critical eye, particularly the roses which are his hobby. But when his wife opens the front door and he finds himself among his own furniture and his decorated china (he was once a pottery artist) and sees houses instead of fields through his drawing-room window the illusion is finally dispelled.

Harry Oakes is an artist in more senses than one. He loves painting and drawing and is now busy on his fourth portrait of his wife. 'I haven't been satisfied with the others,' he confesses, 'and —what is more important—nor has she!' If he had his time over again, Harry Oakes would like to be a farmer. As it is, he is looking for a cottage in the Cotswolds. In the meantime he makes the best of the open air by fishing, playing bowls (he is vice-captain of his local club), and going for drives in the country with his wife.

Harry Oakes' geniality arises partly from contentment. 'Life began for me at fifty-three,' he says, 'when I was given the part of Dan Archer. The last two-and-a-half years have been exciting and absorbing and have brought me more pleasure than any man dare hope for at my age.'

Gwen Berryman leaves her characterisation behind more quickly. Mrs. Archer doesn't drive a car but Miss Berryman leaves Broadcasting House in a blue 8 h.p. car which shines like the saucepans in Doris Archer's kitchen. Her route home lies along the Birmingham New Road through the heart of the Black Country to Goldthorn Hill which, despite its rural name, is a busy suburb of Wolverhampton. There she looks after her widowed father. Until recently she had a small business; now she finds that being an actress and running a home are quite enough for one person to do.

Simon (Eddie Robertson) faces a problem

Tom Forrest (Bob Arnold) takes his dog for a walk

Jack (Denis Folwell)

Peggy (Thelma Rogers)

Before the war Gwen Berryman studied singing at the Royal Academy of Music. Music was to have been her profession, now it is her pastime; and she is never happier than when singing and accompanying herself at the piano. When it is fine she tends the flowers in her two-acre garden, and at weekends she often visits farming friends in Staffordshire 'for the sheer pleasure of living in reality the life that I portray in fiction.'

If Norman Painting were not so busy writing plays and features for radio and reading books, his characterisation of Philip Archer might haunt him long after he has left the studio. For he lives in a bungalow on a Warwickshire farm and from his study window he can see meadows and farm buildings not unlike those described in *The Archers* scripts.

Norman Painting, a twenty-nine-year-old bachelor, is busy at the moment on his current Children's Hour series *Stories of the Saints*. A tutor in Anglo-Saxon, he holds a First-Class Honours degree in English and from Birmingham University won a Research Scholarship to Oxford. He has travelled widely on the Continent and in America, and besides taking part in many BBC plays has given outside-broadcast commentaries.

(Please turn overleaf)

Chris Gittins, who has taken over the part of Walter Gabriel

Ysanne Churchman enjoys a quiet hour with a magazine: she plays Grace Fairbrother

'I'm here to help me brother.' Richard Gray joins Harold Berens at a broadcast of 'Ignorance is Bliss'

MEET THE ARCHERS

(continued from page 5)

Portraying Christine Archer (Philip's sister) comes easily to Pamela Mant for both she and Christine love an outdoor life and enjoy riding. Pamela lives in a primrose-coloured gypsy's caravan near the Severn at Tewkesbury, and when she isn't doing her 'caravan chores' she is riding round the countryside on her black mare 'Jet.' Christine also rides a black mare, only it is named Midnight, and by conspiracy the villagers have compelled Pamela to give her horse the same name as its radio counterpart. 'Everyone called her Midnight and it wasn't long before the horse was refusing to respond to Jet,' says Pamela.

Chris Gittins, who plays that crusty old farmer Walter Gabriel, more often than not leaves the studio for the theatre—the amateur theatre. He spends much of his spare time producing amateur dramatic and operatic societies in and around the industrial town of Stourbridge, where he lives. He also produces plays by youth organisations, for he has been an ardent youth worker for many years. He was active in the Scout movement for a quarter of a century and is now a member of the Guild of Old Scouts and a member of the Welfare Committee of the Worcestershire Regiment Army Cadet Corps.

Although unmarried, Thelma Rogers (Peggy Archer) is keen on housework and helps her mother in their home at Coventry. She was a member of the repertory company at Leicester for over three years, and seizes every opportunity during the season to go to the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon. Shakespeare is her first love, ballet her second. After these come dancing, walking, Jane Austen's novels, and cross-word puzzles.

The city of Leicester provides three of *The Archers* cast: Denis Folwell (Jack Archer), Leslie Bowmar (Mr. Fairbrother) and Pauline Seville (Mrs. Perkins) all hail from there, and after recordings have finished they can be seen hurrying together for the train. When Folwell, who was radio's original Worzel Gummidge, isn't watching Leicester county cricket matches, he is tending his sweet peas in his city garden. Bowmar, who lives on the edge of the city, likes to chat to his many farmer friends about tractors and ploughing. He is an acknowledged authority on both subjects, having professionally demonstrated the former and won prizes for the latter. A bachelor, he lives with his mother, plays the piano 'for fun,' and occasionally writes a dance tune 'for home consumption.' Pauline Seville (married last year) makes curtains, lampshades, tablecloths, and firescreens for her new home. Next to sewing and embroidery, she likes cooking and housework and watching Leicestershire ascend the cricket league table.

Also recently married is Arnold Peters, who is glad to say he has none of Len Thomas' domestic problems. A former repertory actor, he lives in his native Northamptonshire where he finds plenty of scope for indulging his passion for photography.

Photography is ignored by Eddie Robinson (Simon) and Bob Arnold (Tom Forrest). They prefer collecting coins and, in intervals between rehearsals, they can often be heard making 'swaps.' Eddie Robinson, an ex-civil servant, lives in a Wolverhampton suburb and prefers watching the Wanderers to walking in the country; Bob Arnold lives in a seventeenth-century Cotswold cottage near the lovely Cotswold town of Burford. Besides coins, he collects folk songs and Cotswold stories which he sings and retails in his rich West Country voice.

Acting is in Ysanne Churchman's blood. Her father is Andrew Churchman, well-known radio and stage actor. He and her husband (the television engineer) are stern critics of her performances in films, theatre, radio and television, as well as in the part of Grace Fairbrother. She was seen recently by viewers as Bridget O'Hara in the episode dealing with magistrates' courts in television's *The Course of Justice*.

The original Walter Gabriel (Robert Mawdesley)

Arnold Peters plays Len Thomas

Leslie Bowmar plays Mr. Fairbrother

NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE

BOTH SIDES OF

WHOSE violinist used to specialise in being shot out of a cannon at a circus? There are no prizes for answering that question since such an artist could belong only to an outfit as bizarre as Sid Millward's Nitwits. His fellow-players call him Major Willis of the Coldstream Guards because, if you understand us, though his name is Willis he has never been near the Guards. We heard about this violinist when we saw Sid the other day and learned how his combination, again adding to the craziness of *Ignorance is Bliss*, was formed. It began in 1937 when Sid was principal saxophone in Jack Hylton's band. He left to form his own orchestra which was booked for a crazy-night edition of *Monday Night at Seven*. 'We were branded as a crazy band from then on,' says Sid.

But the craziness remained muted until the middle of the war when he joined 'Stars in Battledress' and had posted to his band several people whose talent lay more in comedy than in music. 'They arrived and they stuck,' says Sid, 'and my job ever since has been to make sure that some music remains.' A post-war concert at the Royal Albert Hall was followed by the engagement for the first series of *Ignorance is Bliss*.

Now the nine-piece band spends a lot of time on the Continent: 'There are no language barriers in our kind of comedy.' Sid concentrates on the clarinet (he studied all the wood-wind instruments at the Royal College of Music) and does most of the arranging for the band. He is careful, he says, never to guy music that he considers sublime, though merely good music is not immune.

Fun in Literary Bohemia

WIT and humour have never been absent from the Third Programme, as its regular listeners know, but the right sort of material is hard to find. This week Henry Reed proves his versatility as a radio writer by contributing a mock-solemn account of a young critic's research into the life of an imaginary novelist, Richard Shewin, 'the Balzac of the twentieth century.' The critic, Reeve (whose name no one seems able to catch), meets some very odd characters indeed and makes disconcerting discoveries, which in no way shake his reverential approach to his subject.

At appropriate moments we are given passages from the works of Richard Shewin, which bear such titles as *The Hot and the Cold, The Bang and the Whimper*. Though he is supposed to have had affinities with Balzac, the extracts quoted suggest that he was not uninfluenced by Henry James. Before long we realise that the title of the programme, *A Very Great Man Indeed*, is a little ironical, to say the least.

The characters from whom Reeve tries to extract information about his hero are skilfully contrasted and make an amusing cross-section of the pseudo-